



Jim Doyle, Governor
John A. Scocos, Secretary

STATE OF WISCONSIN, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

30 West Mifflin Street, P.O. Box 7843, Madison, WI 53707-7843

PHONE: (608) 266-1311 1-800-947-8387 (WIS VETS)

WEB SITE: <http://dva.state.wi.us>

E-MAIL: Headquarters@dva.state.wi.us

FAX: (608) 267-0403

May 17, 2007

Senator Jim Sullivan, Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs,
Biotechnology and Financial Institutions
Room 15 South, State Capitol

Dear Senator Sullivan and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and the state's half-million veterans we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the four bills under consideration by the Committee today.

Senate Bill 19 - Relating to: creditable military service under the Wisconsin Retirement System.

Included in WDVA's 2007-09 budget request and identified by the department as legislative priority is to allow for the purchase of **years of military service as creditable service for benefits under the Wisconsin Retirement System**. This is a measure of long-term interest in the veterans' community. SB 19 would provide these years for veterans with post-1974 military service at no cost, like the benefit allowed under current law for veterans with pre-1974 service, who would continue to qualify under the program available under current law.

This is an important measure not only for equitable treatment of all veterans who are employed under the Wisconsin Retirement System, but also as a possible incentive for recruitment of former military service members by WRS-covered public employers.

Assembly Bill 63 - Relating to: Hire a Veteran Week, Veteran Recognition Week, and veterans who volunteer in schools.

We have been pleased to work closely with the bill's author on this bill, and appreciate the interest of the bill's cosponsors and the members of this committee today in issues of importance to those who have served in our nation's armed forces, often at great personal sacrifice.

We are pleased to be in full support of this bill, which will offer incentives for veterans to participate in classroom educational activities. We believe that the service of the veterans of our armed forces is of significant educational value to our young people, particularly of veterans who served overseas in both war and peace, including peacekeeping and peace-making missions in far-flung corners of the globe.

Having veterans in the classroom enriches the study of history, social studies, geography, and literature, told interactively from the perspective of someone "who was there." According to the most current VA data, Wisconsin's population of roughly five and a half million includes about 469,000 veterans – or nearly one in

every five men in this state is a veteran. In short, it is unlikely that schools will have any difficulty in finding veterans available to come and share from their experiences in an educational setting.

We have had reports that in some Wisconsin schools, Veterans Day is not observed or recognized. Designating a week and providing the incentives of this bill may help provide a needed boost need to educating our youth about the implications of foreign policies, domestic choices, and the realities of war.

Through our Wisconsin Veterans Museum, the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs has a Veterans in the Classroom program and maintains an active listing of veterans available as speakers around the state. This bill will add momentum to this effort.

In 2003, the department produced a certificate upon enactment of the "Taps" program that is provided by a funeral director to an eligible student who plays "Taps" as part of a veteran's military funeral honors. While that certificate is substantive in nature – providing a \$25 tuition voucher to the student for his or her services – the honorary certificate produced by the department under this bill, if it is enacted, would be similar in appearance to the "Taps" model.

We recognize the current value of "Hire a Veteran Week," as provided in the current statutes, and appreciate the earlier work to amend the bill's language as drafted to preserve that designation while creating a new designation for recognizing our state's veterans, particularly given the impact of this bill. We also appreciate the careful work of the bill's author in ensuring that the legislative language ensures that these designated weeks actually fall in the week of Veterans Day, November 11th.

We are also proud to support the U.S. Department of Labor's "HireVetsFirst" campaign, which has provided ten reasons why to hire a veteran – factors that could receive additional public recognition with the enactment of this important legislation:

1. Accelerated learning curve: Veterans have the proven ability to learn new skills and concepts. In addition, they can enter the workforce with identifiable and transferable skills, proven in real world situations. This background can enhance an organization's productivity.
2. Leadership. The military trains people to lead by example as well as through direction, delegation, motivation and inspiration. Veterans understand the practical ways to manage behaviors for results, even in the most trying circumstances. They also know the dynamics of leadership as part of both hierarchical and peer structures.
3. Teamwork. Veterans understand how genuine teamwork grows out of a responsibility to one's colleagues. Military duties involve a blend of individual and group productivity. They also necessitate a perception of how groups of all sizes relate to each other and an overarching objective.
4. Diversity and inclusion in action.
Veterans have learned to work side by side with individuals regardless of diverse race, gender, geographic origin, ethnic background, religion and economic status as well as mental, physical and attitudinal capabilities. They have the sensitivity to cooperate with many different types of individuals.
5. Efficient performance under pressure. Veterans understand the rigors of tight schedules and limited resources. They have developed the capacity to know how to accomplish priorities on time, in spite of tremendous stress. They know the critical importance of staying with a task until it is done right.
6. Respect for procedures. Veterans have gained a unique perspective on the value of accountability. They can grasp their place within an organizational framework, becoming responsible for subordinates' actions to higher supervisory levels. They know how policies and procedures enable an organization to exist.

7. Technology and globalization. Because of their experiences in the service, veterans are usually aware of international and technical trends pertinent to business and industry. They can bring the kind of global outlook and technological savvy that all enterprises of any size need to succeed.
8. Integrity. Veterans know what it means to do "an honest day's work." Prospective employers can take advantage of a track record of integrity, often including security clearances. This integrity translates into qualities of sincerity and trustworthiness.
9. Conscious of health and safety standards. Thanks to extensive training, veterans are aware of health and safety protocols both for themselves and the welfare of others. Individually, they represent a drug-free workforce that is cognizant of maintaining personal health and fitness. On a company level, their awareness and conscientiousness translate into protection of employees, property and materials.
10. Triumph over adversity. In addition to dealing positively with the typical issues of personal maturity, veterans have frequently triumphed over great adversity. They likely have proven their mettle in mission critical situations demanding endurance, stamina and flexibility. They may have overcome personal disabilities through strengths and determination.

The limited, cost-efficient measures contained in this bill will likely benefit innumerable employers and veterans alike.

Senate Bill 101 - Relating to: expanding eligibility for the veterans and surviving spouses property tax credit.

Among WDVA's legislative priorities are to expand eligibility for the property tax credit. In WDVA's budget request, the expansion was proposed in three areas: to expand the credit to include veterans with at least a 30% service-connected disability combined rating, include individuals with schIndividual Unemployability; to remove the age limit, which is currently set at age 65; and to liberalize the residency requirement to include those who were not Wisconsin residents at the time of entry onto active duty, as current law requires, but who have been a Wisconsin resident for a fixed number of years (e.g. 15, 10, etc.).

SB 101 would achieve the second of the department's current three priorities for expanding eligibility for the Wisconsin Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit by eliminating the current age requirement of at least age 65.

SB 101 would also achieve the third of the department's current three priorities for expanding eligibility for the credit by reducing the residency requirement to just 10 years of state residency. Currently, an eligible veterans must have been a state Resident at the time of Entry onto Active Duty.

Among the most poignant examples of the challenges posed by the current limits of the property tax credit was contact with the department by an elderly WWII veteran who qualified for the property tax credit except for meeting the current residency requirement. He had moved to Wisconsin in 1946, shortly after completing his WWII military service, and had lived his entire life in the state since that time – more than 60 years. Enacting SB 101 would expand the credit to include veterans like this one.

Senate Bill 146 - Relating to: expanding eligibility to claim the veterans and surviving spouses property tax credit.


SB 146 would achieve the first of the department's current three priorities for expanding eligibility for the credit by reducing the service-connected disability (SCD) requirement from the current level of a schedular 100% SCD combined rating to a 60% SCD combined rating. Given that a requirement for Individual Unemployability (I.U.) is to have at least a 60% schedular SCD rating (if one service-connected condition) or a 70% schedular SCD combined rating, this proposal would also encompass all veterans determined to be I.U.

Should both SB 101 and SB 146 be enacted, the expansion would also include those veterans and their surviving spouses who would be under age 65, as included in SB 101, and also have an SCD combined rating of 60, 70, 80, or 90 percent.

Thank you for your consideration of these significant pieces of legislation, for the opportunity to testify here today on these important bills, and for your continued advocacy on behalf of those who have served our nation in its times of need.

A written copy of this testimony has been provided to the clerk, and I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS


WILLIAM J. KLOSTER
Acting Secretary

Veterans Benefits Administration
Data and Information Services

**Counts of Wisconsin Veterans Receiving Compensation by Combined
Evaluation and Age Group**
Data Request

Summary

Data and Information Services (D&IS) provides the following response to a request from the VBA Milwaukee Regional Office received on January 27, 2006.

RO Milwaukee Request

The RO Milwaukee requested a count of Wisconsin veterans receiving compensation with a combined evaluation of 60% or higher or receiving Individual Unemployability, broken down by combined evaluation and age groups.

D&IS Response

D&IS identified **12,243** Wisconsin veterans receiving compensation with a combined evaluation of 60% or higher or receiving Individual Unemployability. Veterans with a 100% evaluation and IU are included in the 100% count. All other veterans receiving IU are included in the IU count, not in the combined evaluation counts. The following table provides the requested counts:

Wisconsin Veterans Receiving Compensation by Combined Evaluation and Age Group			
Combined Evaluation	All Veterans	Veterans 65 and Over	Veterans Under 65
60%	2,283	668	1,615
70%	1,234	283	951
80%	714	196	518
90%	284	63	221
100%	4,137	1,057	3,080
IU	3,591	1,360	2,231
Total	12,243	3,627	8,616



AFSCME®

Thursday, May 17, 2007

To: Members, Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, Biotechnology and Financial Institutions

From: Marty Beil, Executive Director, AFSCME Council 24
Wisconsin State Employees Union

Re: Support for Senate Bill 19
Allowing active duty military to qualify for WRS retirement benefit purposes

The Wisconsin State Employees Union strongly supports SB 19 and urges committee members to recommend passage of this legislation.

Current state law allows military duty performed before 1974 to count for retirement credit. This bill removes the 1974 cut-off date. This legislation also rectifies some peculiarities in state law regarding WRS credit for military service. SB 19 is a long overdue fix that our service men and women richly deserve.

The Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs has recommended passage of AB 43, the Assembly companion to SB 19. We urge the Senate Veterans Committee to do the same and advance this important legislation.

Please feel free to contact me for additional information.

MB/SM

in the public service

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

